

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGUI 1089

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CT
SUBJ: GOVERNMENT CHANGES AND ALLEGED COUP ATTEMPT

SUMMARY: HENRI MAIDOU HAS BECOME ACTING PRIME MINISTER IN THE ABSENCE OF PATASSE ON SICK LEAVE. DEFENSE MINISTER ZANA HAS AGAIN BEEN FIRED AND CHARGED ALONG WITH TWO OTHERS IN A COUP ATTEMPT. THERE ARE SEVERAL OTHER GOVERNMENTAL CHANGES. END SUMMARY.

1. SECOND VICE PRIME MINISTER HENRI MAIDOU HAS OFFICIALLY TAKEN OVER AS ACTING PRIME MINISTER. PRIME MINISTER ANGE PATASSE LEFT MAY 3 FOR UP TO THREE MONTHS OF CONVALESCENCE IN SWITZERLAND. (FIRST VICE PRIME MINISTER KOYAMBA HAS NEVER FULLY RESUMED HIS FUNCTIONS FOLLOWING HIS AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT LAST SUMMER.) THE EMPEROR NOW REFERS TO MAIDOU AS THE PRIME MINISTER.

2. MINISTER OF DEFENSE JEAN-ROBERT ZANA WAS DISMISSED BY IMPERIAL DECREE MAY 13. HE WAS CHARGED WITH A COUP ATTEMPT AND THERE IS A RUMOR THAT HE MAY HAVE BEEN EXECUTED. EVIDENCE OF THE COUP ATTEMPT IS SOME SMALL ARMS ALLEGEDLY FOUND UNDER ZANA'S CONTROL. TWO OF ZANA'S RELATIVES ARE ALSO IMPLICATED.

3. IN OTHER DEVELOPMENTS, THE COMMANDANT OF THE GENDARMERIE,
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BRIG. GEN. AMBROSE MBALE, HAS BEEN REPLACED BY LT. COL. BITIGALAMA NDACKO, WHO WAS HIS DEPUTY. MBALE IS APPARENTLY CHARGED WITH AN UNAUTHORIZED TRIP DURING BOKASSA'S ABSENCE IN NORTH KOREA, BUT HE IS ALSO ACCUSED OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE COUP ATTEMPT. FINALLY, MICHEL ROBINET REPLACED ANTOINE GROTHE AS MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND LABOR, MARKING A CONTINUATION OF GROTHE'S SLIDE SINCE HE LOST THE INTERIOR PORTFOLIO EARLIER

THIS YEAR.

4. COMMENT: WHILE BOKASSA WITHDREW FROM DIRECT CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT WHEN HE BECAME EMPEROR IN DECEMBER 1976, HE HAS STEADILY BEEN RETURNING TO HIS EARLIER PRACTICE OF DIRECT SUPERVISION OF EVERYBODY AND EVERYTHING. THE ALLEGED COUP ATTEMPT, WHICH IS THE FIRST SUCH ALLEGATION SINCE LAST NOVEMBER, WILL ONLY STRENGTHEN THIS TENDENCY. BOKASSA ALREADY HAD DIRECT OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF THE ARMY, OPERATING ESSENTIALLY WITHOUT A CHIEF OF STAFF, AND NOW HE HAS REMOVED THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, WHO THEORETICALLY HAD ADMINISTRATIVE SUPERVISION OF THE MILITARY. ZANA AND THE OTHERS IMPLICATED ARE FROM BOKASSA'S OWN TRIBE, THE MBAKA, AND REPORTEDLY ARE RELATED TO THE EMPRESS, CATHERINE. BOKASSA'S IRE HAS ALSO BEEN AROUSED BY ANTI-BOKASSA TRACTS WHICH WERE DISTRIBUTED AT BERENGO, WHERE THE IMPERIAL COURT IS LOCATED, AND BY SLOGANS WHICH APPEARED ON WALLS IN MBAIKI, NOT FAR FROM THE IMPERIAL COURT, BEFORE HIS RETURN FROM NORTH KOREA MAY 8. HE ADDRESSED THE ARMY MAY 16, INVEIGHING AGAINST INVOLVEMENT IN COUP PLANNING.

6. IN SUCH AN ATMOSPHERE, IT WILL NOT BE EASY FOR ACTING PRIME MINISTER MAIDOU TO DO AS WELL IN RUNNING THE GOVERNMENT AS A WHOLE AS HE HAS DONE AT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. WE HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED BY HIS EFFICIENCY, AND WE HAVE ALWAYS HAD GOOD RELATIONS WITH HIM. BUT WE DOUBT HE WILL BE IMMUNE FROM IMPERIAL INTERFERENCE.

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TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CT, (MAIDOU, HENRI), (ZANA, JEAN-ROBERT), (MBALE, AMBROSE), (NDACKO, BITIGALAMA)
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